

# Interface

## David Pringle

In our January 1993 issue we asked readers to vote on their favourite (and least favourite) stories published in these pages during 1992. Seventy-four ballots were received before the deadline, a sufficient number to give a valid result (we have found in the past that after about 50 ballots are counted the results change very little). As usual, we subtracted all negative mentions from positive ones to arrive at the following scores. Coincidentally, the "field" of stories last year was 74 strong, the largest quantity of fiction that readers have ever had to choose from in one of these polls. To save space, and embarrassment for those who came at the bottom, we give just the top 55 stories here. We hope to report on non-fiction and artwork preferences in the next issue.

### Story Poll Results, 1992

- 1) Garry Kilworth: The Sculptor 31
- 2) J.G. Ballard: The Message from Mars 28
- 3) Eugene Byrne: Cyril the Cyberpig 25
- 4) Greg Egan: Unstable Orbits in the Space of Lies 21
- 5) Diane Mapes: She-Devil 20
- 6=) Molly Brown: Agents of Darkness 19
- 6=) Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne: Tom Joad 19
- 8=) Eric Brown: Epsilon Dreams 18
- 8=) Storm Constantine: Priest of Hands 18
- 8=) Ian R. MacLeod: Returning 18
- 8=) Kim Stanley Robinson: Red Mars 18
- 8=) Ian Watson: The Coming of Vertumnus 18
- 8=) Ian Watson: Swimming with the Salmon 18
- 14=) Sarah Ash: Mothmusic 17
- 14=) Molly Brown: The Vengeance of Grandmother Wu 17
- 14=) Sean McMullen: Pacing the Nightmare 17
- 17=) Ian Lee: No Sense of Humour 16
- 17=) Diane Mapes: Nesting 16
- 17=) Nicholas Royle: The Cast 16
- 20) Julian Flood: The Jade Pool 15
- 21=) Brian Aldiss: Softly – As in an Evening Sunrise 14
- 21=) Greg Egan: The Hundred Light-Year Diary 14
- 21=) Kathleen Ann Goonan: Daydots, Inc. 14
- 24) Graham Joyce: The Careperson 13
- 25=) Barrington J. Bayley: Teatray in the Sky 12
- 25=) Paul Di Filippo: Destroy All Brains! 12
- 27=) David Garnett: Off the Track 11
- 27=) Elizabeth Hand: Engels Unaware 11
- 27=) William F. Temple: Testimony 11
- 30=) Greg Egan: Reification Highway 10
- 31=) Stephen Baxter: The Orchards of the Moon 9
- 31=) Robert Irwin: The Monastery of Alcobaca 9
- 31=) Gwyneth Jones: Blue Clay Blues 9
- 34=) Stephen Blanchard: The Fat People 8
- 34=) Paul Di Filippo: World Wars III 8
- 34=) Ian McDonald: The Best & the Rest of James Joyce 8
- 34=) Diane Mapes: The Big Yellow Car 8
- 34=) John Meaney: Spring Rain 8
- 39=) Brian Aldiss: Horse Meat 7
- 39=) Stephen Baxter: In the Manner of Trees 7
- 39=) Barrington Bayley: Why Live? Dream! 7
- 39=) Keith Brooke: The Queen of the Burn Plain 7
- 39=) Storm Constantine: Built on Blood 7
- 39=) Julian Flood: Children of a Greater God 7
- 39=) Ian McDonald: Big Chair 7
- 39=) Kim Newman: SQPR 7
- 47=) Michael Cobley: Corrosion 6
- 47=) Greg Egan: Before 6
- 49=) J.G. Ballard: A Guide to Virtual Death 5
- 49=) Keith Brooke: Jurassic and the Great Tree 5
- 49=) M. John Harrison: Anima 5
- 49=) Jonathan Lethem: The Speckless Cathedral 5
- 49=) Don Webb: Not of This World 5
- 49=) Ken Wisman: The Dumpster 5
- 55) John Sladek: Reinventing the Wheel 4

### Comments on the Poll Results

The remaining 19 stories all scored fewer than four points, we're sorry to say, with the least popular item ending up with -9. The very controversial story which we had feared would come bottom of the poll this year, Brian Aldiss's "Horse Meat," actually came 39th-equal with seven points (20 people voted for it, 13 against it).

Our heartiest congratulations to **Garry Kilworth** for topping the *Interzone* poll for the first time. Congratulations also to past-winners **J.G. Ballard** and **Greg Egan** for maintaining their form, and to those relatively new writers **Eugene Byrne**, **Diane Mapes** and **Molly Brown** for all doing so well.

It's interesting to compare our readers' preferences with comments which have appeared recently in *Locus: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field* (edited by Charles N. Brown from Oakland, California). In the February 1993 issue, *Locus*'s short-fiction reviewer, **Mark R. Kelly**, listed nine stories as his favourites from the entire sf field in 1992. We're delighted to note that three of them were *Interzone* stories: Brian Aldiss's "Horse Meat," J.G. Ballard's "The Message from Mars" and Greg Egan's "Unstable Orbits in the Space of Lies." For the record, the other six stories selected for special mention by Mark Kelly were by Alex Jeffers (from *Universe 2*), Nancy Kress, Ian R. MacLeod, Lucius Shepard, Michael Swanwick and Connie Willis (all from *Asimov's SF Magazine*). Thanks, Mark!

In addition to Mark Kelly's kind remarks, some 12 stories in all were selected from *Interzone* by various critics for mention in *Locus*'s "1992 Recommended Reading List." This score of a dozen puts us second only to *Asimov's* (which had an unbeatable tally of 34 stories nominated) and above such magazines as *F&SF* (10 stories), *Amazing* (seven stories), *Omni* (seven stories) and *Analog* (two stories) – all of which have much wider U.S. circulations than *Interzone* enjoys.

Apart from the three mentioned above by Mark Kelly, the remaining nine *Interzone* stories which found favour with *Locus* critics were: "The Gödel Sunflowers" by Stephen Baxter, "Priest of Hands" by Storm Constantine, "The Hundred Light-Year Diary" by Greg Egan, "Reification Highway" by Greg Egan, "The Best & the Rest of James Joyce" by Ian McDonald, "Big Chair" by Ian McDonald, "Returning" by Ian R. MacLeod, "She-Devil" by Diane Mapes and "The Coming of Vertumnus" by Ian Watson. We're grateful for all the positive mentions, but it's odd that they missed out on our winner, Garry Kilworth's "The Sculptor."

### Past Poll-Winners

For the information of newer readers, previous *Interzone* story-poll winners were as follows. (In the early days, when the magazine was quarterly, our polling periods were every four issues but did not cover exact calendar years; from the end of 1988, we "annualized" the poll.)

- 1982-3: Keith Roberts, "Kitemaster"
- 1983-4: Geoff Ryman, "The Unconquered Country"
- 1984-5: J.G. Ballard, "The Object of the Attack"
- 1985-6: Ian Watson, "The People on the Precipice"
- 1986-7: Richard Kadrey, "Goodbye Houston Street, Goodbye"
- 1987-8: David Brin, "The Giving Plague"
- 1988: Eric Brown, "The Time-Lapsed Man"
- 1989: Brian Stableford, "The Magic Bullet"

I like all your reviewers. They are both entertaining and informative. High standard maintained. – **Gus Smith**, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorkshire.

The non-fiction is almost uniformly strong. One plea: when Samuel R. Delany's next novel eventually comes out, please make sure that John Clute reviews it at length. That should sort the men from the boys, as it were. I do like a challenging review, and Mr Clute likes to do books justice. – **Michael Sandy**, Luton.

Commenting on the lucidity (not John Clute) and the brevity (not Paul McAuley) of your book-review section, I personally feel you need to take the scalpel to these and cut away the excess verbiage... Although sometimes I don't care for some of the non-fiction, or fiction for that matter, I'd like to thank you for what *Interzone* does provide, and that's a feeling of community and continuity – and that is something that fiction on its own will never manage. So, more power to your elbow. – **Paul Fraser**, Aberdeen.

The non-fiction items I've enjoyed have been the Bob Shaw special – especially Shaw's own article on how to write sf, and the bibliography – but what a dreadful interviewer was thrust upon him! He coped remarkably well considering.

The Douglas Adams interview was good, and Colin Greenland too. I always enjoy "Mutant Popcorn" and the newly-received book listings, but most of the book reviews are too long – John Clute and Mary Gentle are too boring. Wendy Bradley and Paul McAuley are too self-opinionated. "Ansible Link" is an important column, but is in danger I feel of becoming a David Langford self-hype club. – **Duncan Hedderley**, Wantage, Oxon.

I never look at "UK Books Received" and am hardly interested in the bibliographies of individual authors. I hardly ever look at the film reviews, and am not very interested in the TV reviews. Nor do I have much interest in sf conventions and gossip. I look at the book reviews, but there are too many and some are too long. The occasional reviews of science non-fiction books do not interest me much because I have seen them reviewed elsewhere.

The letters are sometimes interesting, but many are too long and I see no point in those that take the form of reviews of stories that I have already read. I would have no objection to a somewhat slimmer magazine, with the non-fiction pruned drastically. – **Laurie Jones**, Beckenham, Kent.

The quality of *Interzone* has been extremely high this year, which makes it difficult to pick out things I disliked. However, a touch more conservatism seems to have come with this consistency. How about letting standards slip a little and shocking us occasionally? My main complaint is that there hasn't been a single story from Lee Montgomerie. Get her weaving! – **T.J. Mason**, Halifax.

Jane's favourite stories: "Pacing the Nightmare" by Sean McMullen, "She-Devil" by Diane Mapes, "No Sense of Humour" by Ian Lee, "The Steel" by Mary A. Turzillo. Sylv's favourite stories: "Children of a Greater God" by Julian Flood, "Mothmusic" by Sarah Ash, "The Sculptor" by Garry Kilworth. Nothing we actively disliked. Weren't that interested in "SQPR," but that's 'cos we're not interested in football. Jane's not enamoured of famous-people-in-alternative-time-line stories (James Joyce, USSA). May your chocolate-chip cookies never crumble. – **Jane & Sylv**, London.

Stories I liked: Paul Di Filippo, "Destroy All Brains!"; Ian McDonald, "The Best and the Rest of James Joyce"; Diane Mapes, "Nesting"; David Garnett, "Off the Track." Special mention for Nick Lowe. His column is always good, and often wonderful: *IZ* 55 and 64 were classics. Give the man an Oscar! John Clute continues to write reviews which are often better than the books. Wendy Bradley's TV column and book reviews are superb. David Langford's "Ansible Link" is irrelevant, silly and quite pointless. I love it. More, please! – **Les Bessant**, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear.

One recent change I do appreciate: the reviews of non-fiction books about science. Keep it up. They generate at least as much interesting writing and comment as the fiction reviews. – **Duncan Hedderley**, Wantage, Oxon.

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My two favourite stories were "Epsilon Dreams" (Eric Brown) and "The Message from Mars" (J.G. Ballard). I was also impressed with "The Careperson" (Graham Joyce) and "The Sculptor" (Garry Kilworth). The best non-fiction was Paul McAuley's book reviews. The best artwork was easily Jim Burns ("The Tiger Sweater," issue 66). I was also impressed by Jason Hurst's pictures in general. – **Andy Gibbons**, no address given.

Despite the crap title, Aldiss's "Softly – As in an Evening Sunrise" was easily the best story you published last year, but I guess not many people will agree with that. And it must be said that although no one does breasts better than Kevin Cullen, Jason Hurst (issue 59) when it comes to buttocks. Thanks for all the fun – if I liked everything in *IZ* I'd probably stop subscribing. – **M. Bould**, Plymouth.

In general, *IZ*'s artwork seems markedly less adventurous than its fiction, and, though most of it is adequate, little of it strikes me as enjoyable for its own sake. The covers seem especially conservative, and could have adorned almost any sf magazine for the last 30 years or so. I realize there may be sound commercial reasons for this, and if they help boost sales, all well and good, though I'm not sure they reflect the contents of the book. Still, so what? I obviously don't buy it for the pictures anyway. – **Tim Lees**, Manchester.

The covers were without exception good and distinctive. Those liked best were the SMS cover (58) and the Mark Harrison painting (65). Those queried are the Tony Roberts (62) and Kevin Cullen (57) – not for any lack of expertise but because the strong, almost exclusive, hardware emphasis tends falsely to stereotype the magazine in the direction of "old-fashioned" sf. I can see however that these can be magazine-shelf sales eyecatchers. – **K.V. Bailey**, Alderney.

Best illustration: SMS for "Priest of Hands." Also very good: Gerry Grace for "Horse Meat," and some Ian Byers. But there was lots of true grot among this year's illustrations. – **Dr Liz Robinson**, East Grinstead.

Keep up the good work with great fiction. Issue 58, the anniversary issue, was particularly good with the attraction of a Ballard story and convinced me to buy the magazine on a regular basis. I enjoy all the non-fiction features, especially the annotated bibliographies and the interviews. Particularly liked the Garry Kilworth interview, the Lawrence Sutin interview [on Philip K. Dick] and the Paul Park interview. – **Noel Megahy**, Belfast.

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